The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Editor:
George Saunders **JULY 1989** **VOLUME 6** **No. 2**

EDITORIAL

In this issue we have an extremely interesting article about children who are not only growing up in a multicultural environment, like many of our readers' children, but who at the same time have to contend with profound deafness. The problems to be faced and overcome are therefore much greater than in the case of hearing children. All families who are battling to raise their children bilingually will surely be inspired by the commitment and optimism expressed in the article.

We also have a warmly written account of a young boy's Italian/English upbringing in the USA. It describes poignantly a father's anguish when his child simply will not answer him in his native Italian and illustrates the virtue of persisting nevertheless in speaking the language to the child.

In "Letters from Readers" we are very pleased to publish two letters from bilingual teenagers living on opposite sides of the world, Denmark and Bolivia. Readers planning to move from one country to another with their children should be encouraged by the experiences of these two young people. A criticism sometimes made of the Newsletter is that we concentrate too much on very young children. We do, it is true, devote much space to that particular age group, mainly because we feel that this is the most crucial stage for determining whether a child will become bilingual or not. In many cases, if children do not acquire the "minority" language spoken by their parent(s) in the home in those first few years, they will acquire only the language of the community outside the home. However, we are also interested in contributions from all age groups on the problems and pleasures of their bilingualism, particularly from young people still attending primary or secondary school. Maintaining and developing a language which is not the language of the environment is something which has to be worked at. So, if you have any thoughts about your own or your family's bilingualism which you feel would be of interest to other readers, please write to us – in brief or in detail.

George Saunders

COMPUTER PROBLEMS!

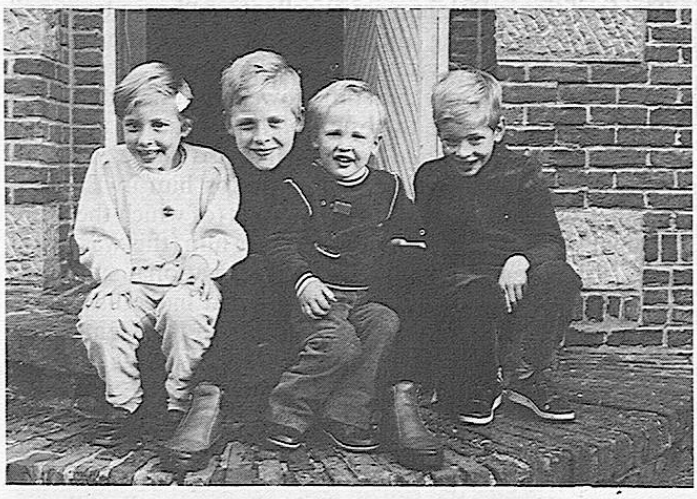
If you started a new subscription, renewed, or changed your address during the period **1st January to 30th April 1989** please let us know.

Due to problems in transferring data to our new computer there have been some cases of information not being correctly recorded. We are checking the records manually but it is a slow process and your information will help to ensure that you do not miss any issues of the Newsletter. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience caused and thanks for any help you can give us.

MULTILINGUAL EXPOSURE FOR PROFOUNDLY DEAF CHILDREN

H. W. Burton, Belgium

We as a family are currently treading a multilingual road – speaking English in the home, encountering French outside the home, at work and at school, and picking up some Belgian sign language in company with our two profoundly deaf sons, and in our relations with their friends and other deaf people in Belgium. While it is early days yet to assess this "choice" – which was in fact more or less forced upon us – our four children still being aged under eight, and the effects of this multilingual exposure not yet being fully apparent – I felt it was useful to record our present stage in development, both to clarify things for ourselves and as a means of sharing our experiences and questions with those who may find themselves in a somewhat similar situation.



Kate, Jamie, Emlyn and Toby

Having said that, I must immediately make certain provisions to relativise any comparisons (which we have ourselves always been very cautious in making, as so many factors make each person's case so different). The main provision I would make in this situation is to state how aware we are of being in a very privileged position – compared, for example, to many ethnic families living in the UK, where so many circumstances other than language – culture, religion and life philosophy, education, financial position – play as great a role. We are privileged in being able to afford in every sense, to be very involved as parents in supporting our deaf children in the course they are embarked upon, to draw on facilities,

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advice, literature, conferences, etc. not only in our country of residence, Belgium, but also in the country of our mother tongue – the UK – and elsewhere in Europe, and the United States. We are also privileged to be linked to a pre-school training centre for deaf infants, the Centre Comprendre et Parler, and a primary school for the deaf, the Ecole Intégrée, in which the staff are extremely open to one experimenting with different ideas (aids, methods, languages and language combinations) and offer wholehearted support – indeed, bilingualism is the norm in this country anyway (where all those living and working in the capital are expected to be able to get by, if not more, in French and Flemish), which means that early exposure to more than one language (at least for hearing children) is viewed *a priori* with much less hesitation than, for example, in Britain.

Despite these provisions qualifying our particularly fortunate situation, we should like to encourage parents in any situation where two languages prevail – either because the parents are of two different mother tongues, or because another tongue is used in the home than that in the surrounding environment – to *contemplate* using both languages in the same way as they could (and should) contemplate using them with their hearing children.

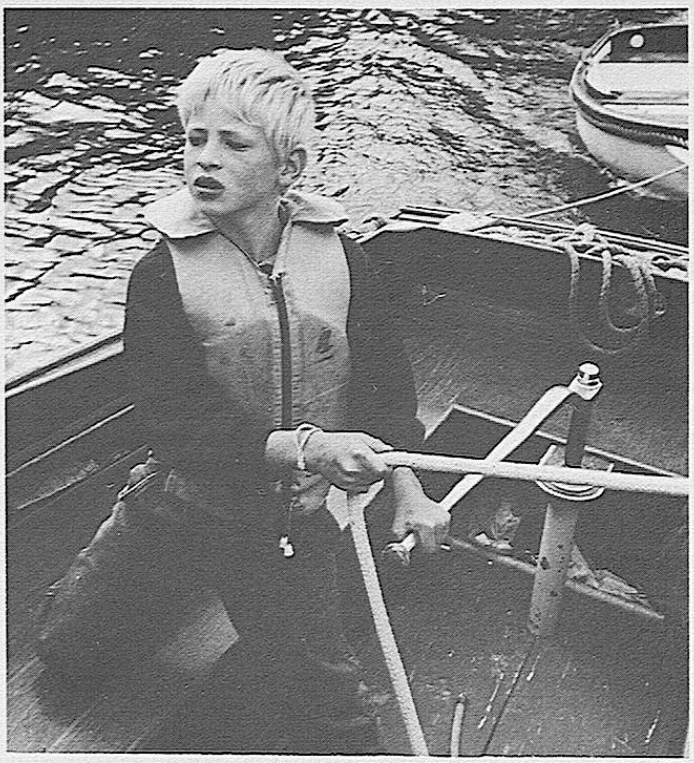
We are British born parents, living in Brussels where we have been for twelve years, and could well be for another twelve. We are at ease in French and have good contacts with our neighbours and working colleagues in that and other languages, but somewhat surprisingly, I would say that over 90 per cent of the conversations within the four walls of our home are in English. Of our four children, Jamie (7), and Kate (4) have attended Belgian pre-schools and crèches (from the age of three months!) and are as bilingual as one could hope for. Toby (6) and Emlyn (2) are profoundly deaf (3rd degree) – both diagnosed early (in the first six months of life).

The facilities in Belgium are excellent – a "home training" speech therapist being allocated to the child immediately upon diagnosis, who visits for an hour a day, five days a week, in the home from then on. However, at the time Toby was diagnosed we were the only *English* speaking family in Brussels with a *profoundly* deaf child, so there were no special educational facilities available for him in English. The English speaking schools in Brussels (of which there are a number) would not contemplate taking him (this was at age three) – they tend to have very high educational standards (not least due to parental pressure) – and indeed sang the praises of boarding schools for the deaf on the Kent Coast ("We could easily visit every weekend" – what a life!). English advisers on both sides of the Channel were adamant: do *not* confront Toby with French; lip-reading is such a hard task – above all do not confuse him with a second language. The other advice we got was: "The most important factor in this child's life at the moment is family support". All very contradictory – this hardly fitted in with export to an English boarding school, nor finding his place in our by definition "European" existence.

On advice from the director of our Therapy Centre, Dr Perier, we did protect Toby from French for the first three years. His speech therapist Françoise knew no English but was working more on producing basic sounds with Toby, and on advising and supporting the parents. We took him out of the French-speaking crèche he had been in since aged three months (I still had an office job), and applied to Dr Cornett at Gallaudet College (Cued Speech Centre) for an au pair with some inkling of what to do with a deaf 18-month old. We were fortunate to have two good girls keen to cross the Atlantic, who looked after Toby, consecutively, for the next three years, in a knowledgeable way.

At aged three, Dr Perier felt Toby needed social contact, and one of the smaller English infant schools agreed to take Toby plus his Cued Speech interpreter. It went very well, Toby loved it, the school was extremely supportive: but increasingly we saw Toby as a spectator on the scene, participating in too many activities (games, story-time, singing, races, etc) at second hand, not in the thick of it, and with no real contact with his classmates except via an adult. (At this stage Toby had had Cued Speech only, no signs, and in English only). We felt this was not fair on him as a child.

So the big step was taken – he entered Dr Perier's school, initially with English interpreter hand in hand but that lasted only two weeks. There they cue in French and use signed French. And Toby (aged six) is now able to attempt speech in French and English (quite aware of when to use which language, though with new people he always asks me first); his comprehension in both languages is rated excellent (thanks to Cued Speech) – though pure lip reading cannot really be put to the test yet); his sign language has given him a mode of self expression both with us (where his speech alone is still painfully insufficient) and with his deaf schoolfriends (vitally important – their company transforms him as a person) which I have no hesitation in recommending.



Toby sailing on Norfolk Broads

From the linguistic point of view I have to add that the sign language question is a complex one in the bilingual (or trilingual) situation (given that sign language itself is, of course, a language). (Cued Speech on the other hand, fortunately, being phonetic, is ideally suited to such multilingual contexts – and indeed is adapted into a very large number of spoken languages, including those of the ethnic minorities in Britain: an Indian family here in Brussels with a severely deaf 18 month year old is using it in Hindi, whilst the speech therapist cues to her in English.

Whilst the child is still at the stage of one word utterances it is not too difficult, as the signs are being used as pure symbols: the code has not become a language yet. Even so, with Emlyn (aged two) it does sometimes strike us as odd when speech therapist Catherine and I sit down with him with a book, he'll point to a dog and sign dog, and look at us in turn for confirmation: one of us will cue back "oui, c'est un chien", and the other "yes, it's a dog". But when at Toby's stage syntax is beginning to emerge more fully and correctly

(Toby tends to use signs intermingled with cued words and always accompanied by sound of which the vowel at least is usually correct in the relevant language), complications arise. He is fortunately at an age of conceptual comprehension when I can explain to him that when speaking English he has to say/sign "I have a *red book*", and in French reverse the order and sign "J'ai un *livre rouge*". For expressions like "Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?"/"What's the matter?" that is more complex – and obviously things are going to increase in complexity. By using Signed French (and not French Sign Language) we are already crucifying a language – and then "translating" it for English purposes makes a mockery of it linguistically and, in terms of its cultural attachments, as a language. But we have no access to BSL (British Sign Language) where we are at present, and Toby would have no other English speaking deaf kids to use it with as yet (I'm reassured it will not be hard for *him* to pick it up when the time comes). I find learning Signed French *very* hard indeed, and could hardly contemplate learning BSL as well. A basic knowledge of French signs enables me to communicate adequately (so far!) with Toby's school friends and a *little bit* with deaf adults we meet socially or at conferences – even to begin to communicate (even if it's little more than a "gesture") with deaf young people from America or other nationalities who cross our paths. This means deaf children and others can come and play and stay, and families and children can enjoy the normal interaction and exchange and mutual relief and friendship that their communication aged six would not permit otherwise if we had remained within a monolingual (i.e. mother tongue) oral context. All these things I deem important for survival of children and parents.

To conclude – Emlyn was born when Toby had just begun at Belgian deaf school. Definitively diagnosed as deaf three months later, we decided – as things appeared to be going so well for Toby – to try the multilingual approach straight away. He attends a (hearing) crèche where the girls have learnt to cue (in French) and use basic signs – and he is quite at ease. His speech therapist works every day with him in French (cues and signs), and at home our communication is entirely in English (cues backed up by Belgian signs). Aged two, he appears to understand (very!) simple cued utterances in either language (of the "where are your shoes/is the cat/Toby/Mummy's car, etc?" type) and replies, alas with little sound to date, in signs (which can be up to three sign utterances, e.g. "bag black car" for "my black car is in my bag".)

This is by no means intended as a blueprint for success or even a progress report: we cannot at all guess how our boys, each in his own way, will acquit themselves linguistically in the future. It could be a complete disaster, at home in none of the three worlds – and we'll keep you posted! However, I believe firmly in two things:

— The evidence of an article in which I read that the part of the brain used for acquiring language develops fast between ages 0 and 6, and thereafter more or less stops developing: after that age, another part of the brain takes over but language learning is no longer with the same ease as before, it becomes a "foreign language learning", whereas before then each new language learnt is as for a mother tongue. (Oh, pray take note, parents and teachers of hearing primary school children, and all those many people *so suspicious* of letting an infant cope with two languages simultaneously – "They'll confuse them – let them get a sound basis in one language first".)

— That Cued Speech is a marvellous tool. As a profoundly deaf child really only picks up utterances that are specifically addressed to him (which are proportionately very few and very "sifted"/condescendingly "tailored") – and if you halve this input by introducing a bilingual situation (signs too, but backing up, doubling the others, not competing with them), then you have to be aware of the need to give the child as much language as possible in as *natural* a setting as possible, and this I really feel Cued Speech does: we can cue (or should) our conversations amongst our (hearing) selves (parents, the other children and acquaintances), so the deaf child can (if he chooses) follow them as much as hearing children do (or don't bother to do). This is the only system that makes this easily possible, with easy transfer into French or English depending on whom you meet at the supermarket next!

In guise of a postscript – for we are now in fact three years further on, let me just hint at the next installment:

The age of reading and writing poses a new series of difficulties for which I have yet to find a helpful "method". Toby may be at ease in understanding either language but vocabulary has often been protectively simplified – a mistake. He lacks the richness of vocabulary, and the knowledge of idiom and syntactic structure to read for pleasure books appropriately interesting for a bright nine-year-old boy. It is hard to find the time to build up vocabulary by reading *to* him, in both languages. Written French is the school's problem – but his written English is almost non-existent – alarming at his age; however, to impose out of school English writing lessons and English speech-therapy would be a recipe for a pre-adolescent revolt of the first order.

Emlyn has never had any English speech therapy nor the concentrated input of the American students Toby had. Yet Cued Speech has built up within him a phonological knowledge of a language he has never spoken and he is recognisably drawing on this awareness to *speak English,* supported by his own Cued words and signs, in the appropriate setting. There is a certain mixture of languages from time to time – often because home and school have different "vocabulary areas". But Emlyn at five, is completely aware which language he is speaking at any time.

To conclude at this stage therefore, I still feel not only that this was the only path we could have trodden (and it is almost impossible to reverse once embarked upon) but that it is a *happy* one – though certainly a hard one, for the children and the parents alike. Hard in terms of "work" implications – but so far still to be recommended in terms of the natural and therefore relatively non-stressed communication it facilitates.

Toby is now at the age where he could in fact choose one or the other (French at home would be one option, English boarding school another), but he takes his trilingualism for granted, it is a natural part of himself: it's just that Monday mornings are that much harder than for the rest of us (French school after a weekend's concentrated English at home). Emlyn on the other hand, turned to his four-year-old deaf girlfriend at the lunch table last week, when communication broke down badly as I used the wrong sign for "ketchup", and said to her in French, "Don't worry, my Mummy doesn't know much French yet – she means red sauce!"

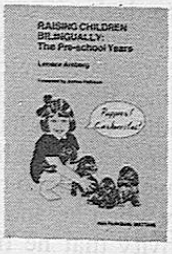
February 1989

RAISING CHILDREN BILINGUALLY: The Pre-school Years

Lenore ARNBERG

Paperback 0-905028-70-8

£6.95 (US$15.00)



GROWING UP BILINGUAL: ANGELO'S STORY

Domenico Maceri

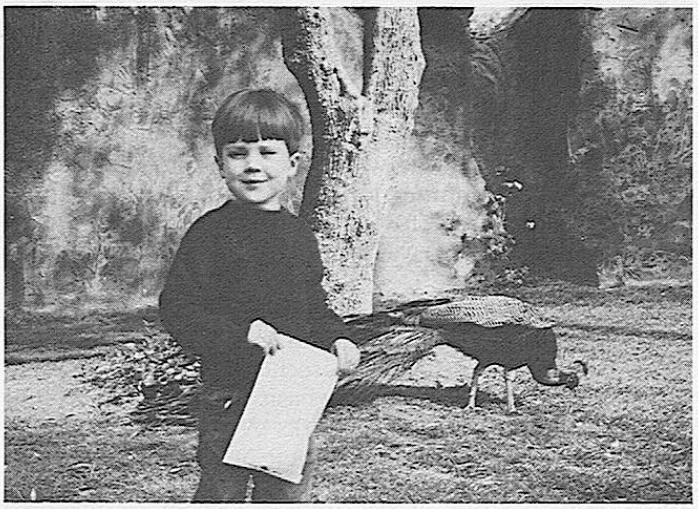
My son Angelo is now four and one half years old. For all of his life I have spoken Italian to him while my wife has always addressed him in English. I should point out that Italian is my native language but I also am fluent in English. In addition I teach Spanish at the college level and have also taught French. My wife, who is a native speaker of English, has also strong passive skills in Italian, especially reading. My wife has also studied German for several years as well as Spanish and French for less than a year each. For both of us therefore languages are very important and we try our very best to see that in addition to English Angelo learns Italian. We live in Santa Maria in California, USA.

Throughout Angelo's life my wife and I have made a definite effort to address Angelo each in our native language. When I speak with my wife, however, we use English. Angelo therefore hears a lot more English than Italian. The outside world is also English-speaking. Most of his books are in English and his classmates in the pre-school he attends are also English-speaking. Clearly English is the dominant language in Angelo's environment. Italian is therefore becoming a second language and Angelo is undoubtedly much more comfortable with English than Italian. But is was not always so.

Until age two, Angelo was completely bilingual. Whatever he knew in English he knew in Italian. During that time he would always translate into English anything I told him thinking that his Mom did not understand it. Since my wife started to read more and more books to him – books in English, which are more readily available – and since she spends more time with him than I do, Angelo started to feel more comfortable with English. At about age three he began to have a definite preference and at times absolutely refused to speak Italian and even stopped being interested in my reading books in Italian to him (many times due to the lack of variety in Italian books I would just translate on the spot some of the books in English). On a few occasions he even started crying because of my insistence on speaking Italian and requiring him to respond in Italian. Clearly, forcing him to use Italian was not the answer. I became quite sad at about this time because I thought he had decided that Italian was not worthwhile. It was not simply the rejection of the language. I felt rejected. I felt a great distance from him. But I decided that being a father and communicating with him, even if not in Italian, took precedence over everything else. I had resigned myself to merely continuing to speak Italian and hope for a response in the language or a response in English.

At about age three something happened that reawakened Angelo's interest in Italian. While we were cleaning some old things in a closet, we discovered an old record to learn Italian. It's entitled "Living Language" and it exists in a number of languages. Basically it consists of phrases being repeated until one learns the language. It's one of those records that is supposed to teach the language in two minutes a day without any effort. I do not know why but I put the record on. Angelo somehow fell in love with the repetition of Italian words and phrases. It seemed that almost daily he would want to listen to the record. He started to be more interested in Italian. I was very glad for that old record. Angelo began to respond to me in Italian more often, especially when he and I were alone or when we talked about an activity that he first experienced with me rather than my wife.

During the summer of Angelo's fourth birthday we visited my parents in New Jersey. They do not speak English. Also visiting was my brother's family from Italy, none of whom speaks much English. When Angelo realised that some people could not communicate with him in English, he started making an effort to communicate in Italian. To most people's surprise he did very well. Everyone was pleased with his ability in Italian. In many ways I was more pleased than anyone since I realised that whatever Italian Angelo knew, he had learned it from **me** and me alone. He was my student. I was doubly proud of him – proud as a father but also proud of him as a teacher. He still preferred to speak English and any time his American cousins came over, he seemed to want to spend time with them rather than with the Italian-speaking ones.



Angelo Maceri

Since our summer trip Angelo has started pre-school, which he really loves. There again, however, the language is English, which will inevitably reinforce his dominant language. Both my wife and I have accepted the fact that English will be his dominant language and Italian a second language. We hope to be able to continue to maintain Italian as a second but strong second language. In this respect we are always trying to make Italian a fun thing to do. For example, Angelo likes very much to play with a tape recorder. Before Christmas I interviewed him in Italian for about half an hour, a tape which I duplicated and sent to my parents and also to my brother's family in Italy. During the interview Angelo answered mostly in Italian, but occasionally he realised that he did not know the word for something. He then asked how to say it in Italian. It's interesting that in spite of the fact that he is more comfortable in English, he tried his very best to respond in Italian. In fact, I think that during the interview he spoke more Italian straight than at any other time. The trick is of course for him to see that Italian is a live language and that it can be fun and something positive to do.

Speaking of positive, Angelo's bilingualism has been very much aided by my wife, who in spite of speaking only English to Angelo, presents Italian and things Italian in a positive way. She occasionally will read an Italian book to Angelo and often makes a request that "she" would like to hear a certain Italian book, or that it would be interesting if Papà

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LETTERS FROM READERS

BILINGUAL TEENAGER WRITES FROM BOLIVIA

My name is Sara Mock. I live in Cochabamba, Bolivia, South America. When I was reading the Newsletter, I came across the note from Patricia Simpson that said that she would like to hear about others' experiences of being bilingual. So here's my experience.

I am originally from Springfield, Missouri, USA. My mother got a job offer from United Bible Societies. The country? Bolivia. The city? Cochabamba. She accepted. At that time I was 12 and a half years old and didn't remember any of the Spanish I had learned in Mexico when I was four. As soon as we got here I was put into a school where the teaching was in pure Spanish. UFF!!!! I listened to Spanish but thought in English. One day I realised that something was wrong, something was missing. Then I got it!!!! I was thinking in Spanish without translating it.

I am now 13, going to be 14 in two months. I adore Bolivia now and I would never leave, not even to return to the USA. The reasons that keep me here are my friends (mostly), my feelings, and the custom of carnaval. I am now fluent in both languages, I have no problem with either one.

I encourage all the people who are trying to learn another language and find it impossible, to keep pushing ahead, and someday it will come to you just like that, and you will realise that you have mastered it.

Sara K. Mock

BILINGUAL TEENAGER WRITES FROM DENMARK

You asked teenagers to write to your newsletter so here are my observations. I'm 13 and speak English at home and Danish outside it.

I moved to Denmark at the age of seven. At first I went to the local Danish school where I was put with the other children of my age in the first class, although I had been at school for three years before. (This incompatibility was why I later moved to an international school.) I started to learn Danish with my class and as they learned individual letters I found I could read aloud as well or even better than the others though I could not understand a word I read. This made me something of an oddity and at playtime boys from the bigger classes came over to practise their English on me. Some of them could only manage "You're a silly monkey", but they still seemed pleased when I responded.

After three months I moved to an international school, where I joined a beginner's Danish class for three half hour lessons a week. After six months I was fluent enough to move to the intermediates together with children who were half Danish.

Three years later I returned to a local school and, as English instruction begins in fifth class of Danish school, English lessons were too easy, so my mother set me English work to do.

The English teacher seems pleased to have someone to whom she can safely ask questions and often asks my opinion on current usage in English. Sometimes she makes mistakes, but I never say anything.

The other children in my class like having an "English kid" to ask and particularly enjoy hearing my accent when I read aloud from their English book. Afterwards they imitate my accent and say things like "Pass the tea, James".

Last year we started learning German. Many people thought I might find it hard because I was learning the German in Danish. The other day I was writing a Danish physics report using an English reference book, I just read it in English and wrote it in Danish without even thinking about it.

I always use English with my parents and English with my little brother (eight) at home and Danish when we are out. I never mix the two languages, but my brother sometimes does if he doesn't know the right word.

I also babysit young English/Danish-speaking children. They use the English words they know when speaking to their mothers and Danish to their fathers and seem to manage perfectly well.

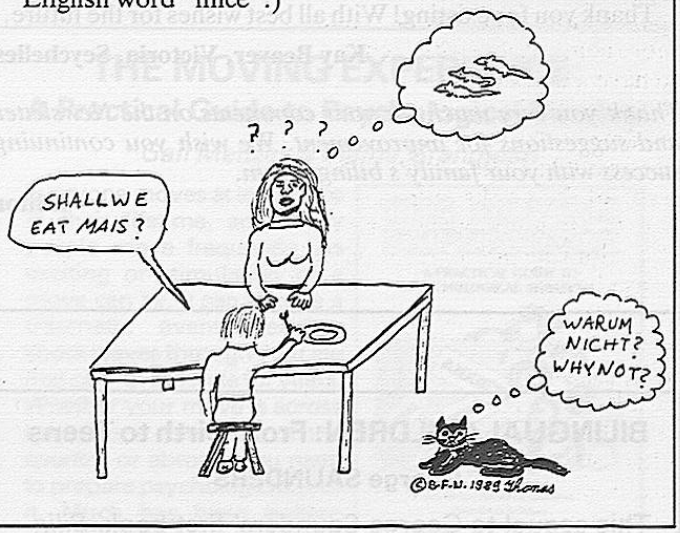
I am a rather shy person and so in the early stages I often found it quite embarassing to be forced to use a language which I knew I did not speak correctly. Maybe that has helped me to develop more confidence than if I had continued to just speak one language. I realised I'd have to get over worrying about whether I was making a fool of myself if I was ever to get any new friends. As I now have many Danish friends, I must have succeeded.

Lara (Sophie) Herbert, Værløse, Denmark

BILINGUAL HUMOUR

Maureen and Reinhold Trott, Glinde, West Germany

Richard (4;7) suggested: "Shall we eat Mais?" "Mice?", asked his mother, quite amazed, "You can't eat mice!" As it turned out, he had picked up the German work "Mais" (= maize, sweet corn) from his childminder and used it in English as he had forgotten the English equivalent. ("Mais" is pronounced like the English word "mice".)



GOODBYE

I am not renewing my subscription to the Newsletter. This is only because, with my children now well into their teens, a large part of the reports and discussions are no longer of burning interest to us.

I would like to emphasise, however, that I always found the issues interesting, and I much appreciate the undogmatic way in which the Newsletter offered advice.

Pat Langfelder

It's been good having you with us, and we wish you all the best for the future.

– Editor

THANK YOU AND FAREWELL

I would like to say how much I have appreciated Lenore Arnberg's book *Raising Children Bilingually* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1987). I found it stimulating and very readable, and it enabled me to be far more objective about the development of my own small children's bilingualism. Fortunately, Seychelles is one of those countries where many people are trilingual, speaking Kreol, English and French, so the children are living in a situation where they hear all three languages from a fairly early age, even if they don't understand all three. Nevertheless, the practical advice contained in Lenore's book has helped me to feel more at ease with bringing up the children in this situation.

As I am not renewing my subscription to the Newsletter, I feel I ought to offer some suggestions or criticism or at least comment. For myself, the Newsletter fulfilled a need which I had when my first child was born – it gave information (of a limited sort) and potential support, and this was important at a time when there were so many questions in my mind. Maybe that is the value of the Newsletter – when you don't know what is going to happen to your child's language development because you know of few "models" or only negative ones, the support is essential. However, I found the Newsletter less useful in terms of practical suggestions. The problem is perhaps that there are so many different bilingual/family situations that suggestions for one family would be inappropriate for another.

Now that more books exist about multilingualism, making them known to Newsletter readers is one of the most important things the Newsletter can do, I think.

I hope the Newsletter continues to be a source of support for isolated and questioning parents at the time when they most need it. As for me, I am moving on to other areas of my life (and those of my family) which need attention, thought and reappraisal.

Thank you for existing! With all best wishes for the future.

Kay Beaver, Victoria, Seychelles

Thank you very much for your comments on the Newsletter and suggestions for improvement. We wish you continuing success with your family's bilingualism.

– Editor

BILINGUAL CHILDREN: From Birth to Teens

George SAUNDERS

This sequel to George Saunders' first book, *Bilingual Children: Guidance for the Family* continues the story of bringing up children as successful bilinguals to the age of thirteen. There have been substantial alterations and additions to the original text and a complete new chapter (two varieties of German meet: a family language and a national language) covering the period when the children went to school in Germany for the first time ever. As in the earlier book, introductory chapters cover the theoretical background to bilingualism and these have been modified to include the most recent research material.

1988
Paperback 1-85359-009-6 £7.95 (US$17.00)
Hardback 1-85359-010-X £23.00 (US$49.00)

READERS' QUERIES

I am the single parent of my 15 month old daughter, Sophie. We live by ourselves in Hania, Crete, where I have been living for 10 years now. I work as a teacher of English as a foreign language. We have absolutely no contact with Sophie's father. Although the situation is not ideal, I feel I can provide a secure and reasonably comfortable upbringing for Sophie.

The reason why I'm writing to you is to see if you can offer advice on bringing up a child to be bilingual. In all the "baby and child" literature I have read, the few references I have come across of course suggest systems of language use in the more common two-parent family, i.e. each parent using their native tongue with the child.

At present, I don't actually feel I have a problem, since at home I always speak to Sophie in English (my mother tongue, I am British) which I am 100% sure she understands and is indeed now starting to use herself. An English-speaking babysitter looks after Sophie during my morning teaching sessions, and Vasso, speaking only Greek, takes care of her while I teach in the afternoons. Vasso feels that Sophie understands most of what she says, a judgement I respect, since she is a trained nursery school teacher. Also, Sophie is exposed to Greek all the time outside the home, and when we are out together it seems more natural for me to speak Greek to her, since that's the language going on around us.

However, it would be reassuring to read and consider any advice or suggestions you might have to offer, even if it were simply accounts of other people's experiences under similar circumstances. There are, of course, numerous other foreigners living here with children, but for the most part they are with a Greek partner, and so the child has both languages at home.

Rosie Chapman, Hania, Crete, Greece

It is true that single parents have not received much attention in the literature on bilingualism, including our Newsletter, and we would be happy to rectify this situation if people in such circumstances would like to write to us about their experiences.

In your own case, your situation differs linguistically very little from that in a family where each parent speaks their native language to the children, since you have made sure that Sophie has both English-speaking and Greek-speaking childminders. You may even be in a better position to bring up your daughter bilingually, since you will have more time on your own with her in the evenings and at weekends. The minority language, in your case English, is in most cases in a weaker position and consequently needs a lot of input – talking to the child, having cassettes, books, etc. available. The more the child is required to actively use the language, the better.

By now you will have received a list of books on family bilingualism which we recommend. We wish you every success in bringing up Sophie as a competent Greek-English bilingual.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Please continue to send us your "stories", anecdotes, jokes, useful hints or any other contributions you think might interest our readers.

Remember, this Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you.

Though I have been able to get hold of only three of the past issues of *The Bilingual Family Newsletter*, I would like to let you know how much I admire your and your colleagues' work. I find the information in the Newsletter very interesting and regret that I did not find out about its existence earlier. I will do my best to canvas on your behalf among my friends. I am a member of the so called Cross-Cultural Association here in Athens, the aim of which is to get together non-Greeks who are married here or just live here permanently, together with native Greeks, to gain awareness of our own and others' cultures and to learn more about the process of living cross-culturally.

I am from Czechoslovakia, of Czech nationality and of Czech mother tongue. During my teens I lived for four years in Great Britain, studied for A-levels and spent a year at London University. My command of English is good but I never considered myself bilingual. While at university in Prague, Czechoslovakia, I met my future husband, who was himself a student at the same university and who is Greek-Cypriot. We live now in Athens in a Czech-Greek marriage. My husband's command of Czech is very good, having lived in Czechoslovakia for over seven years during his university studies. We have now a son of nine months old. In connection with our family situation I would like to ask you several questions.

How should we speak to our child? It is my belief from the literature I have read on the subject, that it would be best for us both to speak Czech to him since I expect that his exposure to Czech will be very limited – I have only a few Czech friends here in Athens and do not see them regularly and we will probably be able to visit Czechoslovakia only once or twice every two years – and that he should be exposed to Czech through us as often as possible. My husband feels reasonably comfortable with this and his communication with our son up to now has been approximately 75% Czech. Mine is almost 100% Czech though I do speak to him a few words in Greek occasionally, e.g. nursery rhymes in Czech and Greek. Is this the right approach with a rare mother tongue language like Czech? Should we try and expose him to it as much as possible, i.e. my husband as well as me, or should it be enough just from me?

My second question concerns the written command of Czech and Greek. *Both languages use different, completely different, characters.* I expect that ideally my child would speak Czech and Greek when he enters a Greek school here in Greece and that he will learn to write in Greek first. *How soon should I introduce him to Latin letters/characters* which are used in Czech? Should I do it even before he enters a Greek school? Is it not confusing to the child to be learning two alphabets at once – shouldn't one be learnt after the other and which one should be, in our case, first? The one he will be using at school first?

My penultimate question is a curiosity in a sense. In Czech the expression for the word "no" (opposite to yes) is "ne" pronounced as the first syllable in the English word "necessity". In Greek the word pronounced in exactly the same way means the exact opposite, i.e. "Yes" (written in Greek "ναι"). How should one tackle this? I thought that I will use only the Greek word for "no" pronounced "ochi", the "ch" like in the Scottish "loch", but mostly I forget and use the Czech word. Has anybody any similar experience with some other two languages?

My last question concerns the learning of a third language. Though both Czech and Greek are very beautiful languages and I would first of all like our child to be bilingual in those two, these two languages are unfortunately not much use to him in the rest of the world and I would definitely like him to learn English at some point as well. When should a child living in our situation start with a third language? On what factors does that decision depend?

Miloslava Ruzkova, Athens, Greece

The method which you propose for raising your son bilingually has a very good chance of success. If your husband is happy with speaking Czech to your son, this will greatly increase his exposure to the language in what is a predominantly Greek-speaking environment and also ensure that your son has to *use* Czech much more than if he only spoke it to you. There is another important advantage, in that your son will hear both his mother *and* his father using the minority language, and the fact that his father is not a native speaker of Czech but still happy to speak it will increase the status of the language in your son's eyes.

With regard to the different alphabets used by Czech and Greek, this may cause your son a little confusion at the start, but he will quickly master the two systems. Even monolingual children have to contend with different forms of printing which are in turn different from handwriting. My daughter, Katrina, for example, who is now in grade 3, prints in English at school, but when she writes in German at home with me uses German handwriting (which is different from the Australian handwriting system).

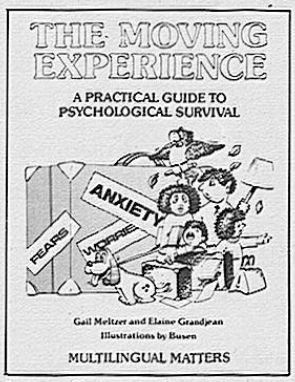
As for the Greek word for "yes" sounding like the Czech word for "no", again, I don't think you need worry unduly, although there will undoubtedly be occasions when you will all have a good laugh about the confusion. However, it is likely that by about age two, your son will be distinguishing carefully between speaking Greek and speaking Czech and will know whether "ne" means yes or no. And no doubt there will be the odd occasion when he deliberately misinterprets a Czech "ne" as a Greek "ναι" to get what he wants!

There are children who are introduced to and cope with a third language at a very young age. No doubt your son will eventually be taught English at school, but you may wish to explore other possibilities of introducing it to him before then. Perhaps you can find an English-speaking playgroup. Since you have a very good command of English, perhaps you could teach him some English yourself.

THE MOVING EXPERIENCE:

A Practical Guide to Psychological Survival

Gail Meltzer & Elaine Grandjean



Everyone moves at least once in their lifetime, and many people move frequently. As exciting or stimulating as a move can be, it can also be a traumatic event, sending shock waves through your life that can reverberate for years. Whether your move is across town, to a new part of the country or abroad, you need to prepare psychologically for it. Much has been written about how to pack your china so that it arrives unbroken. Little, until now, about how to deal with your emotions so that they too arrive in one piece.

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April 1989 1-85359-057-6 £6.95

CONTACTS

If you wish your name and address to be included in the Contact section, please send us the following information:

Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the type of families with whom you would like to get in touch.

Please send your queries, answers and/or contributions to George Saunders at either of the two addresses below:

Contact details removed

If you do not already subscribe to the Bilingual Family Newsletter use the form below to enter a subscription for the next four issues.

If you know of any other bilingual families please help to secure the future of this publication by entering their address on the form and we will send them a free sample of a recent issue.

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July 1989

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Continued from page four

would read the Italian translation of a book in English. She also makes it a point to indicate that there are many languages in the world and that Italian and English are merely two of them. Angelo has begun to notice that we often hear people speaking Spanish and he points it out to me. He also has realised that "Gigio" – a TV program we watch in Spanish on *Univisión,* the Spanish International Network – not only speaks English and Italian but now that the Italian mouse has a show in Mexico City, he also speaks Spanish. Since Angelo really loves the multilingual mouse, he is receiving positive signals about languages.

In spite of our efforts we realise that if Angelo is going to retain Italian we'll have to do more. We are contemplating a trip to Italy where we hope to spend the entire summer vacation and hopefully to spend an entire year in the not-too-distant future. We realise that in order to make Italian a live language, great efforts will have to be made.

Will Angelo be bilingual – or multilingual – when he grows up? We do not know for sure but we will try our best to see that he does. Ultimately, as he grows up, it will be his decision. In the meanwhile Angelo has recenty been very positive about Italian. Santa Claus brought him a lot of gifts – most of those he had requested. But he also received other gifts from Befana, the witch who on January 6, brings gifts to Italian children. She came to our house and Angelo made sure we left cookies and milk for her as we did for Santa Claus. Befana came later than Santa because she had a very long trip since California is very far from Italy. Being bilingual, as we can all see, has obvious advantages.

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